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Announcing the Winner of the First Maps Community Challenge



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Homeless teens struggle with all of the typical teenage issues, but they have the added worries of where to sleep; how to stay warm, dry and safe; and when they will have access to food. The [Maps Community Foundation](#), the charitable affiliate of Maps Credit Union, looked to the community for ideas of how to better provide assistance to these teens as they navigate the streets and look for ways to find a home, a job, and a stable support network.

Entries in the first Community Challenge Award showed creativity, research and knowledge of the needs of this group of often marginalized teens because many of the entries came from the workers at local nonprofits serving them, said Mitzi Smith, community development officer at Maps Credit Union. Mitzi and Maps CU VP of Development Jill Nowacki created the challenge and worked with staff to select the issue for the first award program.

After a two-month submission period and a one-month judging period, the Maps Community Foundation selected Cyndi Astley, deputy director of the [Community Action Agency](#), to receive a \$1,000 prize for her idea to help solve the issue of teen homelessness. Her solution, a Culinary Arts Program, would provide homeless teens instruction and mentorship in food preparation as a means to greater self-esteem, more control over their ability to provide food for themselves and future employment. The foundation will also provide a \$1,000 award to the Community Action Agency.

Cyndi's project was selected from a group of three finalists. "The volunteer judges worked hard to narrow down the finalists and select the winning idea," said Mitzi. "We were thrilled with the depth of ideas submitted, but it came down to a project that would be sustainable within a limited budget and that would have the greatest effect on the target population."

When deciding how to structure her submission and what to focus on for her solution, Astley looked at the main issues for the teens who visit [HOME Youth & Resource Center](#), a drop-in shelter run by the Community Action Agency. One subject that came up again and again, she said, was food. She asked herself how she could connect that need with the need to build skills. "I would like to have the 6,700 meals provided at HOME prepared by students," she said. "Youth interested in the program would cook the meals served at HOME under the tutelage of a chef."

The other two finalists also came from local nonprofits.

Molly Schreiner, an AmeriCORPS Vista volunteer at HOME Youth & Resource Center, presented a project that would match teens with local businesses where they could work at no charge to the business. Teens would be paid with Visa gift cards after completing a set number of hours at the business.

Alison Weaver, branch director of the [Boys & Girls Club of Woodburn](#), plans monthly Homeless Youth Awareness Fairs to help homeless teens connect with local agencies that can help them get education, health care, employment, housing, and other important services.

Jill is proud of the submissions submitted by community members. "But the real power of this project," she continued, "is in raising the awareness in our community. We got people talking about homeless teens and how to help them, even if they didn't prepare a submission to the contest." You can find out more about how you can help these organizations serve the community on their websites.



About the author: Jennifer Cadiente is the communications specialist at Maps Credit Union. She has been with the credit union since 2006, working on magazines and newspapers before joining Maps.

Posted by Jennifer Cadiente


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